

# CORRECTIONAL OASIS

A PUBLICATION OF DESERT WATERS CORRECTIONAL OUTREACH  
A NON-PROFIT FOR THE WELL-BEING OF CORRECTIONAL STAFF & THEIR FAMILIES

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## From The Old Screw

### New Officer On The Block

Being a new Officer in Corrections is something hard to tell anyone about. It stirs up all kinds of emotions. Thrill, knowing that not everyone can do our job. A little fear, knowing that in our line of work we might not go home someday. Doubt, not knowing if we will be able to handle our jobs and meet everyone's requirements. Hope, that we will not let our loved ones or fellow Officers down.

Almost every new Officer wonders, "How do I treat the inmates? Do I let them know who is boss? Do I act as if I'm human?"

A few will try to be a good ol' boys and act friendly toward the inmates. A few will try to show how big and bad they are. The smart ones will watch the experienced staff. Of course sometimes that doesn't work because veteran staff may have their own problems. In the end it all boils down to a training experience as you learn what not to do and why.

So treat every assignment as a learning experience. If you make a mistake, tell someone before the inmates do or before they act as if they are protecting you. Inmates love it when new Officers make mistakes. What they love even more is when you try to cover your mistake up. I guarantee you, whatever you cover up someday will come back to haunt you. When you make a mistake, it'd be best that you let your supervisor know right away, before inmates start working on you.

New staff looks for approval, but they must not seek it from the inmates. If inmates tell new staff that they like it better when *they* are on duty, staff need to stop, step back, and review how they are handling things. When you hear this from an inmate, you can be sure of one thing: you are doing something wrong. Not every Officer will step back and look at what they are doing, but again not every Officer will be there at the end of six months or a year. No one expects new staff to do

everything correctly right off the bat. But if you are ready to learn, you will learn from your mistakes and others'.

New Officers tend to over-react and that is part of the learning curve. If you catch yourself getting up-tight, stop, count to ten, take a deep breath, and continue. New staff must realize that the inmates will continue to check you out, and will try to push your buttons and manipulate you to see if it will work. If you lose it, they won.

If an inmate tells you, "I do this all the time when Officer X is on duty," tell them you will check it out and see if it is OK. Until then, they must wait for that other officer to come back on duty. The more they protest, the more you know you have made the right decision by not giving in.

New staff must also learn not to get caught up in the rumor mill. At times Corrections is a very boring job. Judge each staff member by the way they treat you, not by the bad word someone puts out on them. The Officer someone badmouthed may be the same Officer who puts his life on the line for you in a crisis. Yes, that old grouch that people put down may just be tired of all the cowboys and seeing so many staff come and go. If approached with respect, he may be only too happy to help you all he can. I've been there and I've seen it happen.

Take care,

*The Old Screw*

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#### In Memoriam

**Vicki Anne Marcellus**  
10/26/1962 — 12/24/2005

**Lori C. Stodghill**  
11/11/1974 — 1/1/2006



## Jail Staff Turnover: What Can Be Done About It?

Ken Kerle, Ph.D., Managing Editor, *American Jail Association*. From *American Jails*, November/December 2005. Reprinted with permission.

Turnover is something that is hard to get a handle on. First, states and counties do not require regular annual reports on staff turnover. They should! If taxpayers could be made more aware of the turnover problem in their counties (if in fact it is a problem) through publication of the turnover data, then perhaps more attention would be paid to it. Second, turnover can vary from county to county depending on the local state of the economy (other jobs available which are comparable or above jail salaries), and whether or not the jail component of the department has pay parity with other divisions in the organization. Third, proper staffing of the jail itself still remains a challenge for many local jurisdictions and it will probably always remain a significant challenge since staffing comprises at least three quarters of a jail budget.

Some states of which I'm aware publish monthly reports on the total number of inmates held in the county jails. Why not a published annual report on jail turnover? Possibly there are valid reasons for not doing this, but I have not learned what they are.

It might prove embarrassing for voters to learn that the pay scale is so bad in some jurisdictions that jail staff become eligible for food stamps. Although it is dying out, there still remain a few departments where the jail is looked upon as a stepping stone to road patrol. This is totally unacceptable if a county wishes to steer a course in the direction of a professionally operated jail. In a small county sheriff's department, it is understandable why it would be necessary to certify both police and jail officers in law enforcement and corrections, but in the larger department's employers ought to commit themselves to a unified pay scale which encompasses both police and corrections arms, although each arm is a separate career path.

Second, counties ought to make a decision whether or not they could or should operate a jail. "Mom and Pop" jails held ascendancy in the 19<sup>th</sup> and most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but jails with rated capacities of 50 or under have experienced a rapid decline with the advent of regional jails and the slow but steady increase in larger jails systems.

Population trends in the direction of metropolitan areas underscore the need for modern management changes where the direct supervision jail approach is understood with all of its implications for a better trained and educated workforce. Young people with college degrees in criminal justice or the social sciences will not be attracted to a career in local corrections where the job demands are great, but the rewards are few. Elected county officials only delude themselves if they believe that "any warm body off of the street" is suitable for a job which requires management and supervision skills. That time has passed and elected officials need a vision on what the jail could become with the proper support from citizens in the community.

Third, there is the failure to appropriate enough money for sufficient jail staff. Over 20 years ago *The State of Our Nation's Jails* identified the lack of funding for jail staff as the number one problem according to the jail administrators and sheriffs who participated in the survey questionnaire. Career minded people who aspire to make a difference in the world of jails can get disillusioned when they discover the county won't support the concept of an adequate jail staff. It is no surprise that they pack up and leave.

It was during the 1970s and 1980s that jails underwent the lawsuit baptism which cost counties millions of dollars for failure to meet minimal jail standards---a failure that led to the violation of the constitutional rights of the incarcerated. Why is it so difficult for local government to remember this history and comprehend that county jails could be a plus and not a minus? Why is it still a big challenge to persuade local and state politicians that local jails need more attention in terms of training and standards and proper staffing? If officials would spend some time examining the reasons for this, they would probably begin to get a good insight into jail turnover. This is only the beginning. Once the turnover analysis is completed, then action of an organized, intelligent approach to solving the problem could begin.

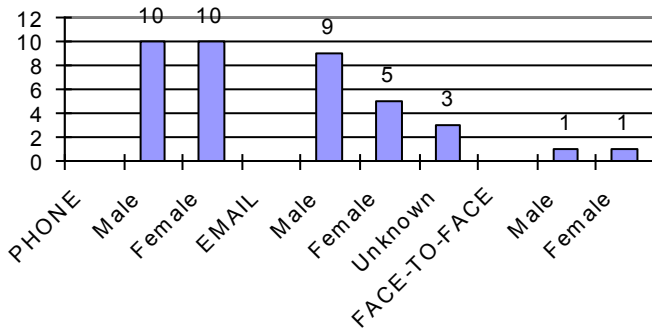
# From Caterina's Desk

## REPORTING ON THE CORRECTIONS VENTLINE

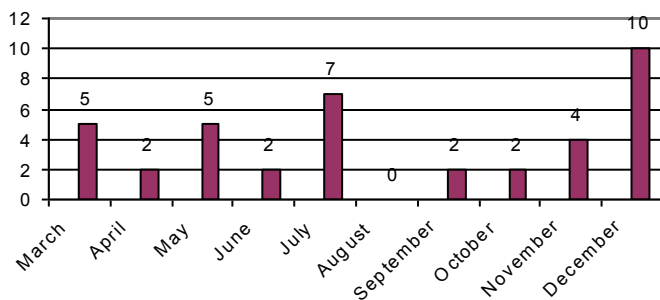
In 2005 we kicked off the Corrections Ventline, our 24/7 anonymous and confidential crisis intervention, support and information hotline (phone and email) for corrections staff and their loved ones nationwide. The email branch of the Ventline was officially launched in April, and the Ventline phone line became operational in July. However, we began to receive phone calls and emails at our offices in March. In total, we had 39 contacts in our first year, a great start for this unique service!

To assess the effectiveness of our intervention, we ask Ventline users to complete a before-and-after distress rating. At the end of the call, they rate their distress from 1 to 10 when they first contacted us and again at the end of the call (or after they have received our email response). We also ask them if the contact was helpful. For those who answered, distress went down an average of 4.2 units and all said the Ventline contact was helpful. Here is a summary of additional Ventline data in 2005.

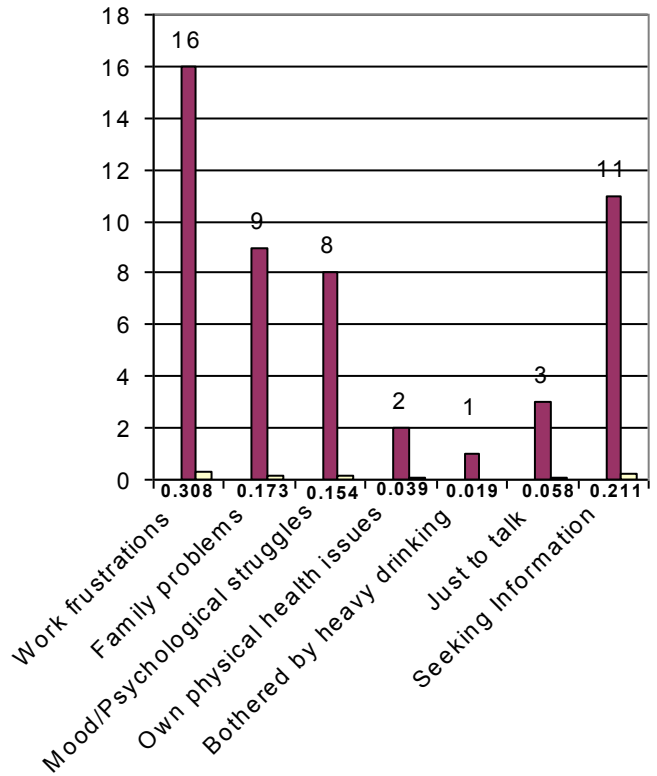
**Ventline contacts by gender and method**



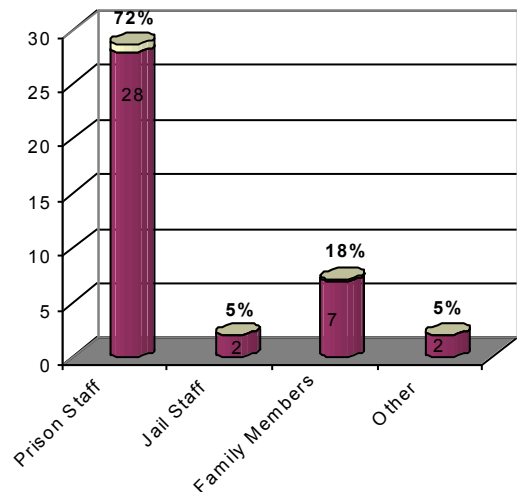
**Ventline contacts by month**



**Primary reasons for Ventline contact**



**Contacts by status of Ventline user**



# Desert Waters

Correctional Outreach



*a non-profit organization  
for the well-being of correctional  
staff and their families*

**Caterina Spinaris Tudor, Ph.D.**  
**Executive Director**

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**BLOGS**

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**1-866-YOU-VENT**  
**(866.968.8368)**  
[youvent@desertwaters.com](mailto:youvent@desertwaters.com)

## Letter To The Editor

Dear Caterina:

More than anything else, I believe it is critical for community colleges, colleges, and universities to start offering a course on jails. Fewer than 10 schools of the over 1,000 which have criminal justice/criminology courses do this. More students who graduate need exposure to what goes on in their own backyards. This means obligatory visits to jails during their course work. It also is incumbent upon jail administrators to ask for help in the evaluation of jail programs for both staff and inmates.

I spent ten years as an academic and taught classes

in government, public administration, and criminal justice at the community college, college, and university levels. I attend several criminal justice conferences each year with the intent to encourage more emphasis to be placed on jails. It is slow going, believe me---about one inch of progress each year, but it is a mission worth doing.

If any of your readers can assist me in this regard, I would appreciate hearing from them.

Ken Kerle

Managing Editor

American Jail Association

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